



Claire McCaskill

United States Senator

Summary Report:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Integrated Service Network 15 Medical Centers
Kansas City VA Medical Center

Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program

Report No: 2015 – KC – 04



<http://www.mccaskill.senate.gov>



Kansas City Region Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program

Since arriving in the United States Senate, Senator Claire McCaskill has made keeping our nation's promises to veterans one of her highest priorities. As the daughter of a World War II veteran, Claire knows the vital sacrifices that veterans have made for the security of our country and in defense of our core values and freedoms. In return for their service, she believes that our country owes veterans a sacred debt of gratitude, which includes access to safe, quality, reliable medical care through our U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system of hospitals and clinics, both in Missouri and across the country.

Following a series of highly-publicized incidents in 2010 which called into question the standard of care provided by the St. Louis VA Medical Center - John Cochran Division, Claire reached out to Missouri veterans and VA administrators to address the erosion of confidence in the overall quality of care and customer service at John Cochran VA Medical Center. Although many veterans report positive experiences with the medical care at John Cochran, concerns persist among veterans with the customer service they receive at the Center and, to a lesser extent, other VA medical facilities in Missouri. In response, Claire announced plans for a "secret shopper" program for veterans—formally named the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program—to rate the quality of service at Missouri VA facilities and to provide the VA with targeted, helpful feedback about veterans' positive and negative experiences at the VA medical centers.

Following the announcement of the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program, Claire and her staff collaborated with leaders from various Missouri veterans' organizations and VA administrators to shape the program. Through this collaboration, a constructive, confidential survey was developed that would be useful to the VA medical centers and act as an independent resource for veterans to make recommendations. The Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program acts as an independent, transparent voice for veterans. It has three major goals:

- (1) Improve communications between veterans and VA medical center personnel;
- (2) Improve overall customer service ratings of VA medical centers in Missouri; and
- (3) Improve the willingness of veterans to positively recommend Missouri VA medical facilities to other veterans.

This report represents the fourth Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report for the Kansas City region facilities and includes a continuing compilation of survey data as reported directly by Missouri veterans.



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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 28, 2015

To the Director of the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center,
Members of the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and Missouri's Veterans:

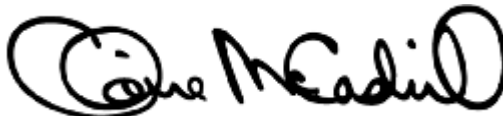
I am pleased to release the results of my fourth Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey for the Kansas City region. After reviewing the responses from this round of surveys, I am encouraged by the commitment of both Missouri veterans and VA officials in the Kansas City region to come together for the sake of improving veterans' experiences at VA facilities. In this fourth Summary Report, Missouri veterans indicated their strong satisfaction with the Kansas City VA medical facilities while noting some room for improvement in their overall experiences. Since the last survey, the Kansas City VA Medical Center has shown some improvement in several response categories, suggesting that VA staff are showing veterans the respect they rightly deserve and improving their communication with patients.

When I first proposed this "secret shopper" program, I told you that I would not be happy until Missouri's veterans are happy. I meant it then, and I mean it now. While in some ways the report suggests veterans' experiences at the VA either decreased or plateaued, we must be careful to avoid drawing too strong a conclusion based on the new rating scale we implemented for the current round of surveys. Going forward, we must sustain this timely, transparent process to ensure our veterans are satisfied with their VA health care experience. To that end, I have instructed my staff to continue working with the veterans' organizations in executing a robust outreach strategy to promote even greater participation.

I remain appreciative of the hard work and professionalism shown by the VA administrators, employees and staff. I know they are committed, as I am, to ensuring veterans have a positive experience while at Missouri VA medical centers. It appears that the leadership at the Kansas City VA Medical Center recognize their tremendous obligation in serving Missouri's veterans, and I appreciate their commitment to responding to the concerns expressed to me in these surveys within 30 days.

Additionally, I am grateful for the help and support from my partners at the Kansas City Region VA as well as several Missouri veterans' organizations. However, most importantly, I am grateful to our veterans for their service, sacrifice and support for the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program. Together we *can* and *will* improve the quality of customer care in Missouri's VA medical facilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Claire McCaskill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "M".

Claire McCaskill
United States Senator

The following members of my staff participated in the preparation of this report:

Brook Balentine
Corey Dillon
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Would you like your voice heard?

Veterans can complete a survey of their current experience at a VA facility at:
<http://mccaskill.senate.gov/vcsp/>.



REPORT

We have reviewed the responses received from the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program (VCSP) survey for the Kansas City region. The small number of survey results that we received from veterans visiting VA medical centers in other regions in the state were reviewed by senate office caseworkers and responded to on a case-by-case basis if casework was necessary. When these survey results from other regions included recommendations for improvements with the overall Veterans Affairs (VA) medical system, we incorporated those comments in the current report. The scope of our review included, but was not necessarily limited to, comments received about Kansas City VA Medical Centers and its Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (collectively referred to as Kansas City VA or VA) through the period ending April 13, 2015. Comments after that period will be reviewed in the next summary report.

The objectives of our review were to:

- Identify specific concerns from veterans regarding the customer service received while interacting with the Kansas City VA Medical Center;
- Identify areas where communication can be improved between veterans and the Kansas City VA Medical Center;
- Identify criticisms impacting the overall customer service ratings of the Kansas City VA Medical Center;
- Identify concerns that impact the willingness of veterans to positively recommend the Kansas City VA Medical Center to other veterans;
- Report the full range of responses received from the veterans regarding the Kansas City VA; and
- Issue a public report of the survey conclusions and resolutions of any identified issues.

Our methodology included reviewing responses submitted on the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program surveys, identifying any specific urgent issues and working directly with the veteran to get an immediate response from the VA and submitting other concerns identified in the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program to the VA. Some of the veterans elected not to take immediate action regarding issues identified in the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey.

Prior to the issuance of the report, representatives of various veterans' service organizations reviewed the Summary Report and made recommendations for suggested improvements at the VA facilities. Their comments and recommendations have been incorporated in this report.

The VA has provided responses to all recommendations.



SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) oversees the largest healthcare system in the nation through a network of 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks. Missouri is mostly comprised of Veterans Integrated Service Network 15 with a large portion of Southwestern Missouri in Veterans Integrated Service Network 16 and small portions of Northern Missouri in Veterans Integrated Service Network 23. In order for the VA to gauge the satisfaction of veterans receiving care at individual VA medical centers, the VA established the Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients in 2002. The Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients was designed to consolidate multiple VA health care survey programs into a single program that collects data on both inpatient and outpatient experiences of veterans at a VA medical center. The Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients focuses on the quality of *care*.

With the Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients serving as a blueprint, Senator McCaskill's office, veteran leaders and the VA worked together to develop an independent survey to serve as a resource veterans can use to make recommendations to each individual VA medical center regarding the quality of *customer service*.

Scope

The scope of this review included those VA facilities located in the Kansas City region through the period ending April 13, 2015. In the Kansas City region, three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans completed the entire survey during that period.

Information used to complete this report included:

- Completed surveys from veterans who received care at a VA facility.
- Communications with and information received from representatives from the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Modern Warfare, Disabled Veterans of America, the Missouri Association of Veterans Organizations and VA officials.

Methodology

During our review, a database established by and internal to the senate office was used to accumulate results and compile data in tabulated form. In instances where veterans reported the need for immediate or urgent assistance in response to their case, additional information was gathered so the VA could respond immediately to their needs.

Survey questionnaires were available through veterans' service organizations, from VA patient representatives and online at www.mccaskill.senate.gov/vcsp. Veterans self-reported their

customer service experience at the VA facility either directly online or by submitting a written survey to a veterans' service organization or to Senator McCaskill's office that was then entered into the database.

All survey responses, excluding any identifying respondent information, were provided to the VA. In addition, all completed surveys were reviewed independently by representatives of the veterans' service organizations who reviewed comments to be included in the report. Reported comments were chosen based on the significance and relevance of the comment to the given statement. Those comments not selected for reporting were taken into consideration when writing the report but were not directly quoted due to the comments not having as significant a level of relevance to the statement presented, the comments missing key information to draw a conclusion, or volume.

Beginning with the current Summary Report, survey questions and rating scales appear differently from previous reports. In previous versions of the survey, veterans were posed questions with binary response options: "Yes" or "No." Going forward, survey questions and response options have been rewritten to allow veterans to choose an appropriate response in a range of options from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Survey questions now appear as a statement, and veterans have rated their agreement with the statement on a scale spanning 1 through 5, where "5" indicated Strong Agreement and "1" indicated Strong Disagreement.

Limitations

Data presented are compiled from survey information submitted voluntarily by veterans. The comments included were obtained directly from the surveys. These comments were not verified by the senate office through additional procedures for accuracy, validity or completeness.

This is not meant to be a scientifically-constructed study.



OBSERVATIONS & RESULTS

Background

This Summary Report covers the period ending April 13, 2015. During this period, three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans completed the survey for the Kansas City region. In the survey, veterans reported the era that they served. All eras of veterans from World War II to present day were represented with Vietnam era veterans comprising over fifty-eight percent (58.2%) of the respondents. Some veterans indicated they served in multiple eras of service. Below is a table which details the service eras of veterans participating in the survey:

WWII	1.7%
Korean War	8.9%
Vietnam War	58.2%
Desert Shield/Desert Storm	16.4%
Iraq/Afghanistan	8.9%
Other	18.4%

In the survey, over seventy-three percent (73.5%) of veterans indicated that they had received services at the Kansas City VA Medical Center. Some veterans visited multiple VA facilities. Below is a table which describes where the veterans received treatment:

Kansas City VA Medical Center	73.5%
Belton CBOC	2.9%
Cameron Clinic	1.4%
Excelsior Springs, MO CBOC	5.5%
St. Joseph Clinic	1.2%
Warrensburg Clinic	3.7%
Other	26.3%

These veterans utilized multiple services while at the Kansas City VA Medical Center. Three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans reported using the following VA clinic categories:

Primary Care	34.0%	Emergency Room	5.2%	Extended Care	1.7%
Outpatient Clinic	12.1%	Mental Health Services	8.9%	Dental	3.7%
Pharmacy	9.8%	X-Ray	5.8%	Laboratory	13.8%
Travel/Enrollment	2.3%	Main Lobby	4.3%	Specialist Visit	18.2%
Inpatient Care	1.4%	Women's Clinic	2.3%	Spinal Cord Injury Unit	0.3%
Prosthetics	1.4%	Podiatry	2.3%	Family Health (CHAMPVA)	0.6%
Other	37.8%	(examples: Senior Veterans Clinic, Neurology, Cardiology)			

Review of survey question results

This section summarizes the results of each of the questions. Results from the most recent survey (R4) are marked “current,” and results from the previous reports (R1, R2 & R3) are also included. Beginning with the current Summary Report, survey questions and rating scales appear differently from previous reports. In previous versions of the survey, veterans were posed questions with binary response options: “Yes” or “No.” Going forward, survey questions and response options have been rewritten to allow veterans to choose an appropriate response in a range of options from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” Survey questions now appear as a statement, and veterans have rated their agreement with the statement on a scale spanning 1 through 5, where “5” indicated Strong Agreement and “1” indicated Strong Disagreement.

To allow for comparison of results from previous Summary Reports, the current responses have been placed underneath the previous response options for each question.

1. Ease of scheduling appointments

The reported ease of scheduling appointments at a VA facility was mostly positive for this round of surveys; however, concerns were noted.

I was able to schedule my appointment easily.

	R4 (current)	R3	R2	R1
Yes:		75.9%	78.3%	88.2%
No:		24.1%	21.8%	11.8%
Strongly Agree:	42.9%			

Mostly Agree:	16.1%			
Neutral:	13.0%			
Mostly Disagree:	11.0%			
Strongly Disagree	17.0%			

Three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans responded to this question with 205 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they did not have a problem with scheduling their appointments at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. The veterans who indicated they were having trouble with making appointments stated most of their issues were with scheduling appointments over the phone and being unable to reach VA support staff who could schedule an appointment.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“They won’t answer the phone. Tried numerous times. Doctor said to go hang out down there and hope they will see me. I don’t have all day to wait on a maybe.”*
- *“We used to call and talk to a person. A few years ago they changed so you have to call and leave a message. Sometimes they don’t call back for many days.”*
- *“I have NEVER had any problems getting an appointment when I needed it.”*

Recommendation: Continue to make improvements to the scheduling system and ensure that Veterans can easily access patient advocates and quality management staff. Consider implementing an automated appointment reminder system that can notify patients before each scheduled visit.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

The Kansas City VA is always working on ways to improve our scheduling practices. Some of the actions that we have taken to do this are as follows:

- 1. We now use an automated Audiocare system in all of our clinical areas. This system gives Veterans a reminder phone call a few days before their appointments to remind them of their appointment. Veterans are also sent postcards prior to their appointments to remind them of the date, time, and location.*
- 2. We are testing a new Phone Tree system in certain areas to ensure that phone calls are routed to the appropriate staff. This will allow Veterans to get in contact with the correct clinical team.*
- 3. An Automated Call Distribution system is in place that allows supervisors to monitor our incoming phone calls and to ensure that our staff is ready to answer calls as they come in.*
- 4. The Kansas City VA recently implemented an electronic Return to Clinic (RTC) order system. The RTC is put in by the provider so that when a Veteran checks out with a clerk the clerk is able*

to schedule the Veteran for a follow up appointment on the spot. This eliminates the need for the Veteran to have to call the VA for an appointment.

5. A new automated callback system called “QWorx” is being piloted in some of our clinical areas. This system allows Veterans the option to call and leave their phone number in the system. The system will then place all of the numbers in a queue and will automatically distribute the numbers to staff once the staff becomes available. This will eliminate the need for the Veteran to be placed on hold for long periods of time and also allows staff to personally call every Veteran who called into the line.

2. Ease of access to the appointment location at the facility

Most veterans continued to report that they were able to navigate the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region in order to find the location of their appointments.

I was able to find my way to my appointment easily.

	R4 (current)	R3	R2	R1
Yes:		88.5%	91.3%	98.7%
No:		11.5%	8.7%	1.3%
Strongly Agree:	56.8%			
Mostly Agree:	18.7%			
Neutral:	11.0%			
Mostly Disagree:	4.0%			
Strongly Disagree:	9.5%			

Three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans responded to this question with 262 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing they did not have a problem finding their way to appointments at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. We continue to view this as a strong sign that the VA continues to take the necessary steps to help veterans navigate the VA facilities.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“There is generally an attendant on the sidewalk to answer questions, and act as a guide if necessary. If not, there are displays inside. Plus, stopping a caretaker and asking works too. Plenty of help available.”*
- *“The area of the clinic was changed from the 4th floor to the first floor. I was not made aware of this until I went to the previous location.”*
- *“They moved the facility to a different area of the hospital and never told me on my appointment reminder...”*

Recommendation: Continue having greeters meet patients. Encourage all VA staff to offer assistance to patients needing directions. Make recent clinic location changes apparent on signage in the hospital and on appointment reminders.

VA Medical Center's Response:

The Kansas City VA is fortunate to have funding available to make renovations and upgrades at the Medical Center. These renovations often require prolonged periods of construction in the facility which means that clinic spaces are sometimes shifted around throughout the hospital. In order to assist Veterans with navigation throughout the facility we have greeters setup at the main entrance and also have a volunteer group of Veterans known as the Vets 4 Vets that will walk Veterans and their families to their appointments.

3. Cleanliness of the VA facility

Veterans reported satisfaction in the cleanliness of the VA facilities in the Kansas City region, but some of the concerns referenced the restrooms.

At the time of my visit, the VA facility was clean.

	R4 (current)	R3	R2	R1
Excellent:		37.2%	39.1%	49.4%
Above Average (Good):		38.3%	34.8%	39.5%
Average/Fair:		16.9%	21.7%	7.4%
Below Average:		3.8%	0.0%	2.5%
Poor:		3.8%	4.3%	1.2%
Strongly Agree:	50.4%			
Mostly Agree:	25.4%			
Neutral:	15.3%			
Mostly Disagree:	4.3%			
Strongly Disagree:	4.6%			

Three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans responded to this question with 263 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region were clean. Also, the veterans appeared to be pleased with the work done by the maintenance and cleaning staff. Only 31 respondents were critical of the VA medical facility's cleanliness.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"The men's restroom was littered with paper towels and the trash cans were full."*
- *"The men's restroom on the second floor, near the dental clinic was filthy."*
- *"The place looked spotless – inside and out."*

Recommendation: Continue to ensure housekeeping is monitoring high-traffic zones, such as restrooms and main entrances. Specifically, consider establishing a minimum daily frequency for cleaning restrooms. Also, continue to make telephone numbers visible for veterans to call when areas need attention.

VA Medical Center's Response:

The Kansas City VA has dedicated housekeeping staff to all high traffic areas in the hospital from 7:30am to 3:00pm, Monday through Friday. Also, signs have been put up with numbers to contact housekeeping in the event that restrooms are dirty.

4. Amount of time to see a provider from the date requesting the appointment

In previous rounds of this survey, this question was phrased, “Were you able to be seen by your provider in a reasonable amount of time?” Veterans commented that the intent of this question was unclear, since it could be interpreted to mean the wait time in the lobby on the day of the appointment, or it could be interpreted to mean the wait time between the requested and actual appointment. For this round of surveys, the question was rephrased in order to clarify intent.

A majority of veterans indicated that they were seen by their providers in a reasonable amount of time. Veterans reported some dissatisfaction with the amount of time between calling to schedule an appointment and being seen by the provider.

From the date I initially requested the appointment, I was able to be seen by my provider in a reasonable amount of time.

	R4 (current)	R3	R2	R1
Yes:		75.5%	65.2%	90.2%
No:		24.5%	34.8%	9.8%
Strongly Agree:	41.8%			
Mostly Agree:	15.9%			
Neutral:	17.9%			
Mostly Disagree:	8.1%			
Strongly Disagree:	16.4%			

Three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans responded to this question with 200 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they were seen by their VA provider in a reasonable amount of time at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. In some cases, veterans reported that they had to wait longer than they thought was necessary.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“The scheduling is always at least 3 months out. Right now I’m waiting 8 months for an appt.”*
- *“When you make an appointment it can be up to 3 months before you can be seen and this is for me who’s already been in and out of the facility. It’s even longer for those who are first time trying to get in, but when you’re having a psychiatric need, you can’t wait 3 months.”*
- *“The Dental department scheduled me in for a same day appointment. If that isn’t customer service, I don’t know what is.”*

Recommendation: Work with doctors to reduce the length of time patients have to wait to see their doctor.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

The Kansas City VA is working hard to ensure that all Veterans receive timely access to healthcare. We have expanded clinic hours so that Veterans can get appointments before or after work, we are increasing the services offered at our Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), and we are actively hiring more providers and nurses to increase our overall capacity. Also, in accordance with the new Veteran’s Access, Choice and Accountability Act, any Veteran who we cannot see within 30 days of their clinically indicated date or their desired date is being offered the choice to receive their healthcare in the community at the VA’s expense.

5. Communication by the VA staff while the veteran was at the facility

Historically, poor communication between patients and VA personnel has been the main reason veterans and their families contact the senate office. While some veterans reported having difficulty communicating with VA staff, the data continued to show a large percentage of veterans who reported positive communication exchanges.

VA staff communicated well with me and clearly explained what was going on.

	R4 (current)	R3	R2	R1
Yes:		79.3%	60.9%	90.0%
No:		20.7%	39.1%	10.0%
Strongly Agree:	45.8%			
Mostly Agree:	18.4%			
Neutral:	10.7%			
Mostly Disagree:	9.2%			
Strongly Disagree:	15.9%			

Three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans responded to this question with 223 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that the VA staff communicated effectively with them at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. Several survey respondents commented on unsatisfactory communication experiences with VA staff.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“Doctor was arrogant, did very little explanation and treated me like he just wanted to get me out of his office.”*
- *“Again the eye clinic was great, but my primary care many times does not answer the phone and at times I did not get a call back and had to call again. One stretch I had to call six times.”*
- *“These doctors, nurse practitioners and WONDERFUL DEDICATED NURSES go out of their way to keep me informed.”*

Recommendation: The Director’s Veterans Advisory Board is a key element to building and sustaining stronger communication practices. At the same time, transparency and accountability are essential to this effort. Ensure that veterans know how to follow up with medical staff should they have questions following their appointment.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

As part of the Kansas City VA’s mission to provide exceptional healthcare that improves the Veteran’s health and well-being, we remain focused on providing Patient Centered Care. Every employee attends mandatory “Patient Centered Care – Roles and Responsibilities” training. In addition, the KCVa continuously strives to make our clinics accessible to Veterans by increasing services and adding more clinics to meet demand. We have created specialized Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) to support Post Deployment Veterans and Women Veterans. We have planned expansions for several of our Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC’s) and the development of another CBOC in the area. Our hope is to be able to provide greater access and communication for our veterans by bringing the care closer to them.

6. Receiving necessary care while at VA facility

Efficiency of care is a key indicator of strong customer service satisfaction. That is why, beginning with this Summary Report, surveys will include veterans’ feedback on the following statement.

I was able to get the care I needed during my visit.

	R4 (current)	R3	R2	R1
Strongly Agree:	46.7%			
Mostly Agree:	11.8%			

Neutral:	12.1%			
Mostly Disagree:	7.5%			
Strongly Disagree:	21.9%			

Three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans responded to this question with 203 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they received the care they needed during their visit at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. Several survey respondents commented on being denied care.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“My primary care doc was very reluctant to work with me in collaboration to meet my healthcare needs. I have since changed doctors.”*
- *“I have been jumping through the VA hoops for a full year, trying to get my hip pain fixed. Still no light at the end of the tunnel.”*
- *“Care I receive from the VA is better than I have received from private HMO’s for over 30 years.”*

Recommendation: Continue current efforts to ensure that all physician/staff interactions with patients during appointments include a willingness to listen patiently to veterans’ concerns regarding their care. Ensure that sufficient time is allowed for physicians to meet with patients during visits to address concerns and answer questions regarding care.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

Kansas City VA continually works to refine our processes with input from our Veterans focus groups to identify any trends in issues with care. We also seek identification of trends or issues from our Congressional staffers on an ongoing basis as well as our quarterly meetings. We seek regular feedback which is reviewed by our patient satisfaction committee. We also review aggregate feedback from our patient advocates at our Directors Advisory Board and take action for issues. Replying to the sample comments we have developed with our Primary Care PACTS teams which include collaboration for care of a physician, nurse, and administrative team for every patient. We readily work with patients requesting a change of provider. Pain management patients are offered multiple pain management care modalities including physical therapy, mental health, and complementary medicine practices. Pain patients have also been offered the opportunity to receive care through the Veterans Choice Act with a significant percentage who is asked if they desire to be seen outside of the VA wanting to wait additional time to be seen by a VA provider. We also routinely monitor physician scheduling matrices and physician productivity to optimize physician time so they are able to spend enough time with patients during visits to address concerns and answer questions regarding care.

7. Respect shown to the veteran while at the VA facility

The reported respect shown at the Kansas City VA facilities remained high. More than 69 percent of respondents reported that they were receiving the respect they feel they deserved during their VA medical experience.

I was treated with respect while at the VA facility.

	R4 (current)	R3	R2	R1
Yes:		82.4%	73.9%	87.3%
No:		17.6%	26.1%	12.7%
Strongly Agree:	53.9%			
Mostly Agree:	15.6%			
Neutral:	11.2%			
Mostly Disagree:	7.8%			
Strongly Disagree:	11.5%			

Three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans responded to this question with 241 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they were treated with respect while at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. While there were several instances where veterans reported unsatisfactory treatment by specific VA staff, there appears to be an overall culture of respect at the Kansas City VA Medical Center with some room for improvement.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“Mobile facility doesn’t have any privacy to discuss personal matters. The walls and doors are paper thin!”*
- *“On a pre-visit for lab tests I was NOT treated with respect by the lab people. I did report this and they told me it would be investigated.”*
- *“I am always amazed at how professional and courteous all staff members I deal with. I have been going using VA for a few years now and I have never had a bad experience.”*

Recommendation: Continue to ensure that all Medical Center employees, from lobby staff to physicians, are thoroughly trained to provide courteous and efficient customer service to veterans and their families. Continue to emphasize “I CARE: VA Core Values and Characteristics” at all facilities. Continue rewarding employees who demonstrate superior customer service.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

Treating our Veterans with the highest level of respect is at the core of everything we do. At the Kansas City VA all employees are trained on the I CARE values. Every employee is taught these values at our New Employee Orientation and all employees are required to take a yearly training

course on the I CARE values. Also, these values are talked about in large staff meetings such as our monthly Town Halls and our Director's Advisory Board.

8. Willingness to recommend the VA facility to other veterans

A majority of veterans surveyed indicated a willingness to positively recommend Kansas City region VA facilities to other veterans. Over fifty-nine percent (59%) of the respondents indicated they would recommend the VA to other veterans.

I would recommend this VA facility to other veterans.

	R4 (current)	R3	R2	R1
Yes:		77.5%	63.6%	93.4%
No:		22.5%	36.4%	6.6%
Strongly Agree:	44.4%			
Mostly Agree:	15.3%			
Neutral:	18.4%			
Mostly Disagree:	9.8%			
Strongly Disagree:	12.1%			

Three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans responded to this question with 207 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they would recommend the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region to other veterans. However, concerns were noted.

Below are sample positive comments from veterans:

- *"It is very difficult to schedule an appointment, but once you are dealing with the doctors and nurses you couldn't be treated better, or with more care."*
- *"I have never, repeat, never had a problem with this VA facility. They seem to go out of their way to accommodate the veterans seen there. They stick with the problem until it is fixed, and when necessary, get you in on the same day if you are experiencing pain."*
- *"Going to the VA hospital, and to the Belton Outreach Clinic, is like meeting with old friends. Not only the caregivers, but the other patients are people that I can be comfortable with. We have the same values, and the same mutual respect."*

Below are sample concerns from veterans:

- *"Though I used to loudly sing the praises of VA healthcare and its facilities, the decline in service levels and the quality of the overall facility environment has led me to be quiet on the subject with other veterans and non-veterans."*
- *"Quit being treated as part of an assembly line, listen to my concerns."*

- *“It took several months to get my initial appointment after I was approved for care in the Kansas City VA two years ago. I just had to keep calling to get an appointment.”*

Recommendation: Continue building on improvements in patient care and utilize valuable assets such as community-based veterans’ groups to remain aware of any problems with care or customer service as they arise.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

The Kansas City VA actively seeks out opinions from Veterans who receive their care from our facilities. We host monthly meetings with our Veteran Service Organizations in order to listen to any trends in Veteran’s healthcare experience and we meet quarterly with our Congressional Offices to discuss any concerns that they are hearing. Our patient satisfaction committee reviews these findings and implements improvements where possible.

Our Patient Advocates also provide us with data concerning trends in patient complaints in order for us to make changes in the delivery of care when needed. We have also recently added additional Patient Advocates to assist with Veteran needs.

9. Overall experience with your personal doctor or nurse

A veteran’s confidence in his/her personal doctor or nurse is key to evaluating overall customer service experience. For this reason, a new question was added to the survey for this period. The majority of veterans reported having a positive experience with their personal doctor or nurse.

How would you rate your overall experience with your personal doctor or nurse?

	R4 (current)	R3	R2	R1
Excellent:	46.7%			
Above Average (Good):	16.1%			
Average/Fair:	16.4%			
Below Average:	9.5%			
Poor:	11.2%			

Three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans responded to this question with 218 indicating that their experience with their personal doctor or nurse at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region was Excellent or Above Average. Seventy-two (72) respondents rated their overall experience at the VA medical facility was either Below Average or Poor.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“I do not get consistent care because I never see a physician long enough before I get assigned a new one. I think I’m on my 4th doctor in 2 years. Other departments also seem to be changing doctors so that you never know who you are going to see.”*

- *“Don’t know how much of the problem is her specifically as a doctor and how much is just because she is overworked with too many patients.”*
- *“My doctor, Dr. _____, is the best. She saved my life and I always look forward to seeing her. I would not go anywhere else.”*

Recommendation: Continue to implement the recommendations of the veterans’ advisory group, the Veterans’ Customer Satisfaction Program and VA Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) surveys to improve customer service and quality of care at all VA facilities.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

The patient satisfaction committee at the Kansas City VA reviews our SHEP scores on a monthly basis in order to identify any emerging trends. We also work with our Congressional Offices and Veteran Service Organizations to see if there is anything else that we can do to provide the best possible healthcare experience to our Veterans.

If a Veteran is unhappy with the care that they are receiving they can visit our Patient Advocates and/or request that their provider be changed to one that better suits their needs.

10. Overall experience at the VA facility

The VA Medical Center’s continued focus on respect and communication should sustain and improve veterans’ overall satisfaction with their health care experience.

How would you rate your overall experience with the VA Medical Centers?

	R4 (current)	R3	R2	R1
Excellent:	34.9%	37.7%	22.7%	48.7%
Above Average (Good):	22.5%	28.7%	31.8%	34.2%
Average/Fair:	16.1%	13.5%	18.2%	14.5%
Below Average:	12.4%	7.0%	9.1%	0.0%
Poor:	14.1%	13.1%	18.2%	2.6%

Three hundred forty-seven (347) veterans responded to this question with 199 indicating that their overall experience at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region was Excellent or Above Average. Ninety-two (92) respondents rated their overall experience at the VA medical facility was either Below Average or Poor.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“Lots of passing me around when I tried to get help with my husband.”*

- *“I will state that I have had issues with the KCVA since my discharge from active duty. However I don’t have a choice at this time so the KCVA is all I have. 1. Retain doctors. 2. Be more attentive to patient needs.”*
- *“I have had excellent care there for five years. The staff, doctors, nurses, assistants, everyone is great. I also get my mental health at the honor clinic.”*

Recommendation: Continue to implement the recommendations of the veterans’ advisory group, the Veterans’ Customer Satisfaction Program and VA Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) surveys to improve customer service and quality of care at all VA facilities.

VA Medical Center’s Response:

The patient satisfaction committee at the Kansas City VA reviews our SHEP scores on a monthly basis in order to identify any emerging trends. We also work with our Congressional Offices and Veteran Service Organizations to see if there is anything else that we can do to provide the best possible healthcare experience to our Veterans.



VETERANS' RECOMMENDATIONS

The current summary report discloses various issues regarding the customer service received by veterans and other matters as presented below. This section includes some recommendations that veterans have made to improve the VA facility they visited. Most of the recommendations from veterans referenced the same issues outlined throughout this summary report. All comments were provided to the VA.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"Too many phone calls. No central appointment area."*
- *"Wait time for appointment too excessive."*
- *"There are not enough people on staff to answer the phone and speak directly with the veterans when they call."*
- *"I ride to the Kansas City VA on a shuttle bus from Warrensburg, and I am limited to specific days and hours, so that is a limiting factor but all of my clinics work with me on this. I sometimes have a serious problem obtaining a ride. There is a phone # and an extension, but I must leave a message. They don't monitor it very well. I show up for a ride and I am not on the list. Gets frustrating sometimes. I believe it will get better with time, I hope."*
- *"Provide more specific wall directions."*
- *"Possibly better facility maps for directions since rooms aren't necessarily numbered consecutively at the KC VA Hospital."*
- *"Valet parking would be a nice addition due to the long walking distances from the parking area to the building."*
- *"Very confusing building. Need to clarify directions to pavilions."*
- *"The KCVVA hospital could use some improvements in paint jobs and bathrooms."*
- *"Listen to your patients. Don't be condescending."*



RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONALISM OF VA EMPLOYEES BY VETERANS

Is there a provider or a department that does an excellent job that you would like Senator McCaskill to know about?

There are many great professionals working in the Kansas City region's VA medical facilities, and it is important to acknowledge them for their hard work and commitment to service. Two hundred one (201) veterans responded to this question with acknowledgement of appreciation for a provider or a department at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region.

Below are sample responses from veterans. At the request of the VA, employees' names were replaced with their initials to protect their privacy. All responses, in full, were provided to the VA Administration to alert them to employees who were singled out for their professionalism and performance:

- *"The best care I've received, hands down, was from Dr. W. in wound care at the Kansas City VA hospital in Missouri. He listens, takes the time needed for your appointment, and discusses each procedure with you before being performed. He is patient, and understanding. Did I mention he listens to his patients?"*
- *"My primary Dr. is V., she is thorough and has told me that if anything happens, I need to call her. The eye Dr. R. C. is just as excellent, she has made follow up phone calls to see how I was."*
- *"Eye clinic is great."*
- *"Dr. F in pain management. All of the staff at Warrensburg."*
- *"There is a tech in the Sleep Lab that does an excellent job. Very polite and explains everything. His name is J.L."*
- *"I am always treated with respect at the Silver Clinic and all the Dr.'s and Nurses that work there."*
- *"I see Primary care Blue Team they are excellent."*
- *"Dr. M. and Dr. B. go out of their way to take care of patients. They make you feel as if you are the only one in their care. They take their time with you and make sure that you have everything you need to get by until the next visit. Without their care, I would not be the able-bodied person I am today."*

Recommendation: The Kansas City VA Medical Center is fortunate to have so many competent, compassionate professionals. Reward and acknowledge superior employees for their service and job well-done.

VA Medical Center's Response:

Many dedicated and experienced healthcare workers are employed by the Kansas City VA. We try to go out of our way to recognize those who go above and beyond their call of duty in serving Veterans. Just to list a few of the ways in which we recognize staff, we host quarterly Town Halls that are focused on nothing but staff recognition, give out quarterly I CARE recognition awards, recognize an Employee of the Quarter, and give out awards to staff that are caught doing something commendable in the facility. We also share positive news stories and employee highlights through an aggressive social media campaign.



FOLLOW UP ON VA MEDICAL CENTER'S RESPONSES

Since the first Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the VA Medical Center agreed to act on a number of the recommendations outlined in the previous reports, or stated they were already taking action on some of the concerns mentioned in the summary. This section reports the status of the implementation of those commitments.

Ease of scheduling appointments

In the third Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the VA Medical Center stated *"KCVA recently implemented the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) model, which is a team comprised of a provider, RN, LPN and a Medical Support Assistant (MSA). Assigning patients to the PACT model of care ensures that patients have easier access to care by having a designated Point of Contact (POC) for their urgent needs. Routinely we schedule patients within 14 days of the patient's desired date. Additionally PACT teams build in capacity in their schedules to handle most walk in needs. Patients are encouraged and instructed to call their primary care team for any needs they may have. We also encourage patients to enroll in My HealtheVet in order to utilize Secure Messaging, which is a means to communicate any health care needs with their provider. Open lines of communication are encouraged between front line staff and clinicians to facilitate coordination of care in the event of an urgent need. Finally, we have implemented expanded clinical hours on weekday evenings and weekends to accommodate Veterans who may not be able to make daytime appointments."* What is the current status of this initiative aimed at decreasing the amount of time it takes for a patient to see a provider?

VA Medical Center's Response:

President Obama signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA) on August 7, 2014. One of the goals of this new law is for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide timely, high-quality health care for Veterans. At the Kansas City VA we have implemented the requirement of Veterans Choice and continue to provide access with a Community Provider if the service is not offered at the KCVA.

The KCVA continues to work on increasing services for care and we have plans on expanding our outpatient reach into other communities by building an additional Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) and expanding on existing CBOC's in our area. These services and the VACAA law will continue to increase access for our Veterans and should make it easier in scheduling appointments to be seen.

Ease of access to the appointment location at the facility

In the third Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the VA Medical Center stated *"Currently, Kansas City VA Medical Center is participating in the Honoring Veteran's Board Hiring Pilot, which aims to address customer service concerns with front line staff. As a*

recommendation from the board to help identify better candidates during the recruitment process, front line supervisors will be required to complete training courses to increase their interviewing skills and abilities.” What is the current status of this Pilot initiative to increase customer service?

VA Medical Center’s Response:

The interview questions developed by the Honoring Veterans Board were adopted by the front line supervisors for use in interviewing candidates. These questions have proved to be successful in reaching higher level candidates and are still in use today. While not mandated, front line supervisors are encouraged to take online training to improve their interviewing skills and abilities. Additionally, employees are encouraged to take customer service training that focuses on the Veterans.



CONCLUSION

The Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program in the Kansas City region is making progress with regard to customer service at the Kansas City VA Medical Center. This summary report details ways the VA can improve veterans' experiences at the VA medical facilities. This is part of a series of steps the VA is taking to continue improving veterans' experience at the VA medical center in the Kansas City region. The veterans who filled out the survey provided honest, constructive information regarding their experiences at the VA medical facilities during their recent visits. With this information, we compiled a summary report that reflects veterans' experiences and concerns at these facilities.

The VA's Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients report provides the VA with a general overview of veterans' overall quality of care. Alternatively, the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey provides the VA with some specific examples of the quality of the veterans' experiences at the Kansas City region VA facilities.

It is clear from the surveys that there is always room to improve veterans' experiences at the Kansas City Region VA Medical Center. However, based on the feedback from veterans, it appears that veterans are largely satisfied with the Kansas City VA's communication practices, clean environment and culture of respect. Further, I am pleased that the Board's Hiring Pilot has been implemented and is already proving effective in identifying the best candidates to fill important customer service-based positions.

In order to maintain this momentum, we need to continue to work together to identify areas of concern at the VA medical centers, to address the issues and to improve the quality of service that we provide to our veterans.

We encourage our veterans to continue filling out the surveys as their participation in the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program is critical to the success of the program. The senate office will compile the summary reports and the VA Medical Center's responses on an annual basis.

Special thanks to the members of various veterans' service organizations who assisted in the development and completion of the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program: Roland Norris, Ed Slater, Mike Davis, Bob Wonnell, Randy Barnett and Bob Larkin.